

Apple Watch users to get health-related app choices

April 24 2015, by Meg Graham, Chicago Tribune



The world's first watches ran on springs and could run hours behind. The newest watches will measure heart rate and even ask how you're feeling.

A slew of health-related Apple Watch apps have announced they'll launch April 24, including one from health insurer Health Care Service Corporation. The group operates Blue Cross Blue Shield in five states.

HCSC's ramped-up app, Centered, will launch on the Apple Watch app

store on April 24 after launching for iPhones last week. The app measures physical activity and stress levels and guides [users](#) through meditation exercises.

Apple originally circulated an April 24 release date for the Watch but dropped the date from its web page recently. The company's head of retail operations, Angela Ahrendts, indicated in a memo that the watches would not be initially available for in-store purchase, the New York Times reported. Ahrendts said in the memo customers would begin receiving pre-ordered watches on or after April 24, the newspaper reported.

Using the Watch's "Glance" interface, users will be able to track how close they are to "centered" throughout the day, said Patrick Feeney, HCSC's director of emerging and mobile technology. The app will also ask users two or three times a day whether they're feeling "relaxed," "OK" or "stressed." Notifications will provide actionable feedback, like suggesting a walk around the block or a four-minute "mini meditation," for a stressed user.

Other companies will roll out Apple Watch-gearred apps on launch day. Hearing-aid company, Beltone will release an Apple Watch version of an app that lets users adjust volume and noise-reduction settings. WebMD released new features on its app to track medication adherence and provide dosage and safety information.

With a growing pool of health-related Apple Watch apps, HCSC chief marketing officer Darren Rodgers said apps have to be careful to not overwhelm users.

"It's got to be really simple to use, with notifications that are frequent but are not too frequent" and interaction that helps users meet their goals, Rodgers said.

And though the watches won't track blood pressure or [stress levels](#), "conceptually, being on the wrist offers more possibility than being in your pocket or purse," Chunka Mui, author of "The New Killer Apps," wrote in an email. "Jury is still out whether this translates into functionality that makes a real difference in the health space."

Bryant Harland, technology and media analyst for Mintel, said about 15 percent of smartphone users interact with health and fitness apps. He said that number might rise with the Apple Watch, which will come pre-loaded with a handful of apps.

"With the watch, it's a little more passive," he said. "You don't have to download anything to track a lot of that stuff."

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